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REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ADDITIONAL ITEM IN THE AGENDA OF THE FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO UGANDA

Letter dated 25 February 1994 from the Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to request, in accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the forty-eighth session of the Assembly of an additional item of an urgent character entitled "Emergency assistance to Uganda".

Please find attached, in accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the texts of an explanatory memorandum and a draft resolution.

(Signed) Perezi K. KAMUNANWIRE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Uganda is a least developed country that lies astride the equator between the latitudes of 4°30' north and 1°30' south, and the longitudes of 29°30' west and 33° east. Its western part forms part of the East African Rift Valley and is bounded by the Rwenzori mountains, popularly referred to as the Mountains of the Moon.

2. Disaster struck the western region on 6 February 1994, when an earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale devastated the three districts of Kabarole, Bundibugyo and Kasese. Its epicentre is believed to have been in Kisomoro, Bunyangabu county. Since the earthquake first struck, tremors continue to occur at regular intervals, exacerbating the trauma, panic and uncertainty in the region.

II. THE IMPACT OF THE EARTHQUAKE

3. The death toll has so far been limited to eight victims. Nevertheless, the earthquake has dealt a devastating blow to the fragile infrastructure in this rural region, mercilessly damaging hospitals, primary health care centres, schools, roads, veterinary centres, prisons, administrative buildings, commercial buildings, places of religious worship and sites of cultural significance. It has left thousands of residents without shelter or food, left injured residents without access to health care and rendered accessibility to and communication with the area a truly onerous task. The cost of the damage is currently estimated at US$ 59 million. Efforts are under way to ascertain the short- and long-term impact of the earthquake.

4. In addition to the immediate impact on human life and settlements, the earthquake has had ominous environmental consequences that have yet to be fully charted. A crack in the Rwenzori mountains in Kisomoro district has resulted in the creation of a new river, which is gushing down the valley towards the settlements and agricultural land. There is a well-founded fear that this new river will flood the valley, creating a new lake and further displacing thousands of people. The famous hot springs in the region, hitherto a peaceful tourist attraction, now emit sky-high jets of red boiling water. Furthermore, massive land slides are expected once the rains begin.

5. It is clear that the earthquake will have an adverse impact on agriculture and tourism in the region.

III. RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

6. Efforts have been made by the Government to address the emergency relief needs of the area. In this regard, non-governmental organizations, such as the Uganda Red Cross Society and OXFAM, and church organizations, such as the Pentecostal Church of Uganda and the Fort Portal Catholic Diocese, are playing an invaluable role.

7. A fact-finding mission of the Department of Disaster Relief and Resettlement of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is in the process of preparing a comprehensive assessment of the region's needs. The Government has requested the Department for Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat to assist in the areas of damage assessment, provision of relief and coordination of donor activities. A field agency mission on relief requirements is expected to report shortly.

8. Under the overall coordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, committees chaired by the respective District Administrators have been set up to coordinate relief efforts in the three affected districts.

IV. ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

9. On the basis of the initial assessment of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the areas in which urgent assistance is required include the provision of medicine, blankets and tents. Unipots (prefabricated metal huts) are urgently needed to serve as treatment rooms, storage facilities and office accommodations. Polythelene materials are required in the construction of temporary shelters. Wireless communications equipment is vital for communication between Kampala, the capital, and the disaster-struck area. Financial and logistical support to the coordinating team in the field will also be necessary. The Government of Uganda would also appreciate technical assistance in ascertaining the cause of the earthquake, as well as the extent of the damage, and in forecasting the geological future of the region.

10. In the light of the massive damage to infrastructure, the grave consequences for the environment and the incapacity of Uganda, a least developed country presently undertaking structural reform, to respond adequately to the crisis, the Government of Uganda is launching an urgent appeal for assistance from the international community. It is our ardent hope that this appeal for support to Uganda's national efforts at addressing the short-term relief and rehabilitation requirements, as well as the longer-term resettlement, recovery and development needs of the people of Kabarole, Bundibugyo and Kasese, will elicit a positive and prompt response.

Appendix

Draft resolution: emergency assistance to Uganda

The General Assembly,

Deeply concerned about the extensive damage and devastation caused by the major earthquake that recently struck western Uganda,

Noting with concern the urgent need to address the immediate relief requirements of thousands of residents in Kabarole, Bundibugyo and Kasese districts,

Bearing in mind the negative impact of the earthquake on development efforts and on the environment,

Recognizing the efforts by the Ugandan people and Government to respond to this crisis,

Conscious of the financial, organizational and technical constraints that have hampered these efforts,

Aware of the additional pressure on the infrastructure of Uganda resulting from increased inflows of refugees from neighbouring countries in recent years,

1. Declares its solidarity with the Government and people of Uganda in their affliction;

2. Notes with satisfaction the national efforts of Uganda to provide assistance to the victims of the earthquake;

3. Commends the international community, including the Department for Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, for the measures taken thus far in response to the disaster;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to assist the Government and people of Uganda in providing relief and bringing recovery efforts to a successful conclusion;

5. Requests all States and international organizations urgently to provide relief assistance to the victims of the disaster and to provide additional support to Uganda to enable the country to shoulder the additional socio-economic and financial burden resulting from the earthquake;

6. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1994 on the implementation of the present resolution.